

# More *Music* at Menlo



Alessio Bax



Ayano Kataoka



Lily Francis



Sasha Cooke

*Chamber-music festival is back for the eighth summer,  
with concerts focusing on the seasons, World War II, 1920s Paris*

by Rebecca Wallace

**O**ne can never know what Antonio Vivaldi would have made of the thoroughly modern composer George Crumb. At Music@Menlo's season-opener concert, it could be fun to listen and speculate.

On July 23, the chamber-music festival starts its eighth summer on the Peninsula with a concert program called "The Seasons." As one might expect, the night will begin with Vivaldi's classic "The Four Seasons." As one might not expect, the Vivaldi will be followed by Crumb's "Music for a Summer Evening (Makrokosmos III)."

Crumb's 1974 work is by turns surreal, atonal, abstract, melodic and haunting. In the first movement there's a bit that sounds frenetic, like madly circling fireflies. Later on, the third movement starts out dark and low. It's all an intriguing contrast to the lilt of Vivaldi.

Crumb, a Pulitzer- and Grammy-winning composer born in 1929, wrote in the "Summer Evening" CD notes: "As in several of my other works, the musical fabric of 'Summer Evening' results largely from the elaboration of tiny cells into a sort of mosaic design."

He also noted that he wrote the piece for two amplified pianos and percussion — with the percussion instruments including vibraphone, glockenspiel, antique cymbals, Tibetan prayer stones, bongo drums, bamboo wind chimes, a jug, sleigh bells, a slide-whistle, a sistrum and an African thumb piano. Good thing the concert hall is big.

The diversity of the July 23 program seems in tune with this summer's goal for Music@Menlo, which artistic directors David Finckel and Wu Han have described as exploring an "immense constellation" of chamber-music pieces.

This summer, the festival is also adding a new venue. Along with holding concerts at St. Mark's Episcopal Church in Palo Alto and at Menlo School, Music@Menlo has also set performances at the new performing-arts center at Menlo-Atherton High School. The July 23

concert and several others will be at M-A. All feature an array of artists drawn from far and wide, including Finckel, a cellist; and pianist Wu Han.

Musicians new to Music@Menlo this year include the Jupiter String Quartet, violinist/violist Lily Francis, pianist Alessio Bax, percussionist Ayano Kataoka (one of the July 23 performers) and baritone Randall Scarlatta.

Overall, the festival runs from July 23 through Aug. 14. It also includes "Encounter" lectures, recitals, a Chamber Music Institute for music students, and informal discussions on music and art. Some events, such as talks and student performances, are free. Visual artist pilot/photographer Alex S. MacLean will also display his work during the festival.

Following "Seasons," the next in the concert series is "The English Voice." The festival press release states: "With the death of Henry Purcell in 1695, English music entered a long era of silence. The country became known for the next two centuries as 'a land without music' until Sir Edward Elgar reawakened England's composers to the richness of their musical heritage with his iconic 'Enigma Variations' for orchestra in 1896."

Chamber works from this period that will be performed at the concerts on July 25, 26 and 27 include Elgar's Piano Quintet in A Minor, op. 84; and William Walton's Piano Quartet. The Benjamin Britten song cycle "A Charm of Lullabies," op. 41, will feature another artist new to Music@Menlo, soprano Sasha Cooke. She sang the role of Kitty Oppenheimer in John Adams' opera "Doctor Atomic" at the Metropolitan and English National operas.

The next concert, "Vienna," will be performed July 31, Aug. 1 and Aug. 2 and features Arnold Schoenberg's First Chamber Symphony, along with music by Haydn, Beethoven and Brahms.

On Aug. 4 and 5, "Aftermath: 1945" looks at World War II with Richard Strauss' "Metamorphosen" and Dmitry Shostakovich's String Quartet No. 8 in C Minor, op. 110. Tenor Matthew Plenk, also new to the festival, sings in Britten's "The Holy Sonnets of John Donne," op. 35.

The fifth concert, "La Ville-Lumière," heads for Paris from 1920 through 1928, throwing a little George Gershwin ("An American in Paris") into the program with Darius Milhaud's jazz ballet "La création du monde" and works by other composers including Gabriel Fauré, Maurice Ravel and Francis Poulenc. There is one performance scheduled, on Aug. 7.

"Spanish Inspirations," with performances on Aug. 9 and 10, features Spanish composers and the French composers who admired their sound: Isaac Albéniz, Manuel de Falla, Claude Debussy, Joaquín Turina and Ravel.

"Dvořák's America," on Aug. 13 and 14, explores the Czech composer's look at Americana through his String Quartet no. 12 in F Major, op. 96; and Quintet for Two Violins, Two Violas and Cello in E-flat Major, op. 97, "American." Other selections include Samuel Barber songs sung by Sasha Cooke.

The festival's four "Encounter" talks, for which admission is free, seek to further illuminate the music and themes in the concerts, adding social and historical context. They include a July 30 presentation by Ara Guzelimian, provost and dean of the Juilliard School, on musical culture in Vienna between 1762 and 1938. ■

**What:** Music@Menlo, a chamber-music festival with concerts, talks and other events

**Where:** Events are at St. Mark's Episcopal Church, 600 Colorado Ave., Palo Alto; Menlo School, 50 Valparaiso Ave., Atherton; and Menlo-Atherton High School, 555 Middlefield Road, Atherton.

**When:** July 23 through Aug. 14.

**Cost:** Some events are free, but tickets for the major concerts vary in price, ranging from \$10 for students to \$72 for adults.

**Info:** Details are at musicatmenlo.org; call the box office at 650-331-0202.